AN ESSAY ON PRIVILEGES, &c.

1509/1963.

AN

ESSAY

ON PRIVILEGES,

AND PARTICULARLY ON

HEREDITARY NOBILITY.

WIRITTEN BY THE *ABBE SIEYES*,

A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY;

AND

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH, WITH NOTES,

BY A

FOREIGN NOBLEMAN,

NOW IN ENGLAND.

Nobilis hic quocunque venit de gramine, cujus
Clara fuga ante alois, et primus in æquore pulvis.

JUV.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IT is a ſufficient recommendation of the following pamphlet, to ſay that it was written by the ABBE SIEYES, a moſt diſtinguiſhed Member of the National Aſſembly; *and that to its influence, in conjunction with another publication of the ſame author*, are attributed in a great meaſure, the important changes which have been ſo happily effected in France, and particularly the* abolition of Titles and Nobility.

The publication of it in this country, at the preſent criſis, may anſwer two good purpoſes.—A candid peruſal of this work will certainly ſerve to remove the prejudices of Engliſh-

* This book is entitled, *Qu'eſt que c'eſt que le Tiers Etat.*—What is the People? It is a moſt excellent treatiſe on the rights of the people, and on the abſurdities and abuſes of the old monarchical and ariſtocratic government in France.

men, againſt what is at preſent conſidered as the moſt obnoxious meaſure of the National Aſſembly; and it will alſo ſerve to evince to what a dangerous exceſs a blind veneration for abſurd Gothic inſtitutions may be carried, and how careful other nations ought to be of deifying *a particular claſs or order of citizens.*

The reader will find in this pamphlet, the little ground which reaſon, or the truth of things, afford for theſe pernicious feudal eſtabliſhments. He will ſee the very injurious conſequences of them in France; he will ſee that they abſorbed and annihilated all that was good in morals, all that could have been conducive to public proſperity.

The tide runs at preſent ſtrong in this country in favour of regal power and ariſtocratical influence. — No period therefore could be more proper to ſubmit to the public eye writings, the tendency of which is to moderate the rage of ſubmiſſion, and to recal the public to the free uſe of their reaſon upon political topics. The attention which has been paid to a late well-written, but extremely ſuperficial pamphlet, too ſtrongly evinces the neceſſity of bringing forces into the field in ſupport of liberty and truth.

It was my intention, in a preface to this work, to have preſented the reader with a few obſervations on Mr. Burke's *publication; in the proſecution of this plan, however, I found my matter accumulate in proportion to the abſurdities I had to encounter; and my work at length increaſing beyond all the natural limits of a preface, I have determined to ſubmit it to the public in a ſeparate ſtate.*

AN

*ESSAY ON PRIVILEGES,**

AND PARTICULARLY ON

Hereditary Nobility.

PRIVILEGE has been defined to be "A diſpenſation or exemption in favour of him who poſſeſſes it, and a diſcouragement to thoſe who do not." If this then be the caſe, it muſt be allowed that Privileges are a very poor invention indeed! Imagine a ſociety the happieſt and beſt calculated that can be deviſed, can any thing be more evident than that to deſtroy this ſociety, nothing more would be neceſſary than to exempt one party

* The firſt edition of this work appeared in 1788. *Author.*

from the proper duties of ſociety, and to burthen and diſcourage others?

I could have wiſhed to examine Privileges according to their origin, their nature, and their effects; but this arrangement, methodical as it is, would have reduced me to the neceſſity of recurring too frequently to the ſame ideas. But independent of this inconvenience, an examination into their origin would have involved me in a tireſome and endleſs detail of facts, and precedents. What is there indeed ſo abſurd, as not to be ſupported by facts, and precedents, in the manner they are ſometimes applied? I would rather, then, at once allow the pureſt poſſible origin to excluſive Privileges, if that would ſatisfy their admirers: and, in reality, what can they deſire more?

Every Privilege, without diſtinction, has certainly for it's object, the diſpenſing with

the law of the land; or the giving an exclusive right to something that is not prohibited by the law*. "It is the essence, the charac-

* It will be said, perhaps, that the Privileges enjoyed by the English nobility, are not of so odious a nature, and so oppressive to the other class of people, called in this country the Commoners, as those were, which the nobles of France possessed. Thus far and no more is true; for they still fall under the definition of Privileges here given by our author: It is the Privilege of a British peer to be exempt from certain laws, which bind the other members of the community, such as arrest for debt, infamous punishments; and indeed in petty crimes they are exposed to no punishment at all, such as in simple felony; they are also exempted from serving as sheriffs, or on juries; they are to be tried only by men of their own class, who being few, and always the same body, makes the case very different from that of the other ranks of people, who are always to be tried by a different set of men. But the Privileges which give right to a nobleman to something, which ought to be the right of every citizen, are of a much higher importance than those of the late French nobility, they give them an exclusive and hereditary right to be *Legislators* and *Judges*, and the advisers and counsellors of the sovereign. They also constitute them justices of the peace in every part of England.

Transl.

teriſtic of Privilege, to place the poſſeſſor of it beyond the boundaries of common right;" and it is only in one of theſe two modes that this can be effected. In placing the ſubject in this double point of view, it muſt be allowed that all Privileges whatever will be equally involved in the deciſion which will reſult from our preſent enquiry.

In the firſt place, let us only aſk, what is the object of the laws? it is doubtleſs to preſerve the liberty and property of every individual from aſſault and violence. Laws are not made merely for the amuſement of making them. Thoſe which have no effect but to haraſs the citizens, or to abridge them of their liberty, would be diametrically oppoſite to the ends of civil ſociety, and ought to be aboliſhed.

There is one ſupreme law which ought to be the parent of all others, and that is, " Do

wrong to no man." It is this great natural law, which the legiſlature diſtributes, as it were by retail in the different applications of it, which are extended to private orders in ſociety; from that ſource all patriotic laws originate: thoſe which prevent injury from being done to any perſon, are good; thoſe which neither directly nor indirectly contribute to this end, even if they did not manifeſt a malignant intention, are bad; becauſe in the firſt place, they are ſo many needleſs reſtraints upon liberty, and in the next they occupy the place of good laws. Beyond the limits of the law all is free, every thing belongs to every man, except what is aſſigned to any individual by the law. Such, however, is the deplorable effect of long ſervitude on the human mind, that the people of every nation, far from knowing their real value in the ſcale of ſociety, far from feeling that they have even the right of repealing bad laws, are induced to ſuppoſe that nothing is their

own, except what the laws, good, or bad, condeſcend to grant them. They ſeem to be ignorant that liberty and property are paramount to every thing elſe, that men in uniting themſelves in ſociety, could have no other view, but that of placing their rights under a permanent ſafeguard, againſt the enterprizes of bad men, and of indulging themſelves in the mean time under the ſhelter of this protection, in the full exerciſe of their phyſical and moral qualities, more extended by theſe means, more energetic and more abundant in the fruition. They ſeem ignorant that their property, thus increaſed, with all the additions which a new ſpirit of induſtry has been able to accumulate in a ſocial ſtate, is in reality their own, and could never be conſidered as the gift of an extrinſic power; that the tutelary authority is eſtabliſhed by themſelves, not to give them what is their own, but to protect it; and in fine, that every citizen has an inviolable

right not only to all which the laws permit, but to all which they do not prohibit.

By means of theſe elementary principles, we are already enabled to form ſome judgment with reſpect to Privileges; thoſe whoſe object it is to exempt from the law, cannot be defended; every law, as we have already obſerved, expreſsly ſays, "Do wrong to no man:" where then any claſs of citizens enjoys an exemption from any particular law, it is directly ſaying to thoſe citizens, "You are permitted to do wrong." There is no power on earth, which ſhould be authoriſed to make ſuch a conceſſion. If a law is good it ought to bind every individual, if bad it ought to be aboliſhed.

Upon the ſame principles it cannot be juſt, to grant any perſon an excluſive right to any thing, which is not prohibited by law; this would evidently be plundering

other citizens of their right. All which is not prohibited by law, as we have already remarked, is a part of the domain of civil liberty, and is free to the whole community. The grant of any exclusive Privilege to any person, with respect to that which belongs to all, would be, to wrong the whole community, for the sake of an individual; which is an idea at once the most unjust and the most absurd.

All Privileges, then, from the very nature of things, are unjust, odious, and contradictory to the supreme end of every political society.

Honorary Privileges cannot be exempted from the general proscription, because they fall immediately under the definition which we have just stated, that of giving an exclusive right to something

which is not forbidden by the law*, without taking into the account beſides, that under the deceitful title of honorary, there is ſcarcely a place of profit, which theſe honorary Privileges do not invade. But, as there are even found amongſt men of good ſenſe, many who declare themſelves in favour of this ſpecies of Privilege, or who are, at leaſt, diſpoſed to think, that they are entitled to ſome indulgence; it will be neceſſary to examine, whether in reality theſe Privileges are more excuſeable than others.

* Here, again, the Privileges of the Britiſh nobility are included in the honorary claſs; and will be, in conſequence, ſubject to the ſevereſt cenſure, which our author ſo juſtly pronounces againſt this abſurd and tainted ſource of honours and diſtinctions; like the falſe colours which decorate the pirate, and enable him to enſnare the unſuſpecting merchant, ſo theſe falſe marks of honour

"Can often give diſtinction to a knave;
"And make a lord, whom nature made a ſlave."

Tranſ.

For my own part, I freely acknowledge, that I find in this ſpecies of Privileges, a vice beyond the reſt, and that vice ſeems to me enormous. It is, that they tend to degrade the great body of citizens: and certainly, to debaſe the mind of man is not to be conſidered as a ſlight injury. Can it be conceived that a nation could ever conſent to humble, in this manner, twenty-five millions eight hundred thouſand inhabitants, for the ſake of ridiculouſly complimenting two hundred thouſand? Can the moſt artful ſophiſt point out, in a combination ſo anti-ſocial, a ſingle circumſtance which contributes to the general intereſt?

The moſt favourable claim for a conceſſion to an honorary Privilege, would be that of having rendered ſome peculiar ſervices to our country, that is, to the nation, which can be no other than the generality of

the citizens. In ſuch an inſtance, then, let that member, who has deſerved well of the whole community, be rewarded; but let the abſurd folly be avoided, of humbling the whole community to one of it's members. The entire body of citizens is the principal object, it is that which is ſerved: ought it then in any ſenſe to be ſacrificed to a ſervant, who is only entitled to a reward for having rendered it a ſervice?

So palpable a contradiction ought to have been more generally felt, and yet our concluſion will probably appear novel, or at leaſt ſingular, ſince there exiſts among us an inveterate ſuperſtition, which repels the beams of reaſon, and is even offended at a doubt. Some ſavage tribes are delighted with ridiculous deformities, and render to them that homage which ought to be the prize only of natural beauty. Amongſt the northern nations, political excreſcences

much more deformed, and ſtill more noxious, (as they undermine the foundation and diſſolve the fabric of ſociety) are worſhiped with the moſt prodigal reſpect; but this ſuperſtition is paſſing away, and the body which it has long degraded is emerging in all its native ſtrength and beauty.

It may, perhaps, be objected: Would you then refuſe to reward ſervices rendered to the common wealth? No, far from it; but I would not make the rewards of a nation conſiſt in any thing which is unjuſt, or humiliating: we muſt not recompenſe one perſon at the expence of another, and eſpecially at that of almoſt all the reſt: let us not confound two things ſo entirely different as Privileges and rewards.

Are we ſpeaking of ordinary ſervices? to requite ſuch there are ordinary ſalaries, or gratifications of the ſame nature. If a

brilliant action, or an important ſervice, is performed, let it be followed by a rapid advancement in the ſervice, or a diſtinguiſhed employment, in proportion to the talents and ſervices of the perſon; or, if neceſſary, let a penſion be added; but this laſt ought to be recurred to in very few caſes, and under certain circumſtances only, ſuch as old age, wounds, &c. when the other means of reward may not be found adequate.

But this, it will be ſaid, is not enough, we muſt alſo have obvious diſtinctions, we muſt attract the eye, and catch the attention of the public.

For my own part, I muſt anſwer, that the ſervices themſelves, which are rendered to the community and to mankind, conſtitute the moſt laſting diſtinction; and that the public regard and attention will always fol-

low, where this kind of merit is found to exiſt.

Leave it to the public then freely to diſpenſe the marks of it's eſteem. For when with a philoſophic eye, you regard this eſteem as a ſpecies of moral coin, potent in it's effects, you are right; but when you wiſh that the ſole diſtribution of it, ſhould be veſted in the prince, you then contradict your own principles. Nature, a better philoſopher than you, has placed the real ſource of reſpect in the hearts and feelings of the people. It is among the people only that real wants exiſt; there is the country, *there* men of ſuperior abilities are called to conſecrate their talents, there ought of conſequence the treaſury to be placed, whence the recompenſes ſhould be drawn to which they aſpire.

Blind chance, and laws which are blinder

ſtill, have conſpired againſt the multitude; they have been diſinherited, deprived of every thing; they have had nothing left, but the power of honouring with their eſteem thoſe who have rendered themſelves worthy of it; they have no other means left of exciting the emulation of men, worthy of ſerving them: will you rob them then of this laſt valuable poſſeſſion, this laſt reſerve, and in doing this, render their moſt peculiar property of no uſe to their happineſs?

The generality of ſtateſmen having ruined and degraded the great body of the citizens, have accuſtomed themſelves to neglect them; they ſcorn and deſpiſe, almoſt deſervedly, a people who can never become deſpicable but by their own fault; and if they give themſelves any concern about them, it is only to puniſh their crimes: their reſentment flows in torrents upon the people; it is only for the privileged claſs that they re-

ſerve their affections*; but even in that claſs virtue and genius, the dictate of Nature, a ſe-

* As does Mr. Burke, it is not for the numerous and virtuous claſs of conntry miniſters or parſons, that work and toil to earn barely what is ſufficient to ſupport life; but for the mitred clergy, for deans, canons, and all the drones of the church, that have nothing to do for their four or five thouſand a year, but to wear a great wig or lawn ſleeves occaſionally:

> Triumphant plenty with a chearful grace,
> Baſks in their eyes, and ſparkles in their face.
> How ſleek their looks, how goodly is their mein,
> When big they ſtrut behind a double chin!
> Each faculty in blandiſhments they lull,
> Aſpiring to be venerably dull;
> No learn'd debates moleſt their drouſy trance,
> Or diſcompoſe their pompous ignorance;
> But undiſturb'd they loiter life away,
> So wither green, and bloſſom in decay;
> Deep ſunk in down, they by my gentle care
> Avoid th' inclemencies of morning air,
> And leave to tatter'd crape the drudgery of prayer.
>
> GARTH.

It is for theſe he reſerves all his benevolence. It is not for the millions of people that were deprived by the old ſyſtem

cret voice continually and internally ſpeaks to the pure and energetic ſpirits in favour of

in France of the rights of citizens, but for the temporary humiliation of a queen, for the fall of princes and favourites, that Mr. Burke reſerves his compaſſion: ſtrange ſpecies of benevolence and compaſſion! but it muſt be confeſſed of a piece with all his ſentiments of benevolence. This writer differs not in this point from his uſual conduct in political life; he has been perfectly conſiſtent in the objects of his kindneſs and tenderneſs; theſe are always the moſt diſtant from his rank and ſight. It is on the princeſs of an Indian *Zenana*, or the Begums, on Cheit Sing, Nunducomar, and on the princes and lords of Indoſtan, that he beſtows his ſublime affections. As to the ſeveral hundred thouſands of Iriſh peaſantry, who drag out a wretched exiſtence in huts of mouldering clay, who are not ſo well treated as the animals kept for the ſport of their tyrannical lords; and the ſeveral thouſands of Britiſh ſubjects who languiſh in the loathſome walls of a priſon, for the want of a few guineas; the incredible number of diſtreſſed beings of every deſcription, in this immenſe town; the myriads of honeſt and induſtrious people, who, on every capricious war, are dragged from their families, and deſtined to periſh by the ſword of their enemy, or fatigues, hard treatment, and unhealthy climates: theſe are only creatures of an inferior kind, they are of the vulgar, and not entitled to the attentions of an exalted mind, and a benevolent heart, according to the faſhionable ſyſtem of benevolence. *Tranſ.*

the weak. Yes, the ſacred neceſſities of the people will be perpetually the object of meditation to the independent philoſopher; the point to which, publicly or ſecretly, the virtuous citizen will direct his whole attention, to which he will ſacrifice every ſelfiſh view.

The poor repay their benefactors only with bleſſings; but thoſe rewards how ſuperior to all the favours of power! Ah leave the reward of public eſteem to flow freely from the boſom of the nation! leave them to diſcharge their debt to genius and virtue. Let us guard from violation the ſublime principles of humanity, which Nature has been attentive to imprint in the bottom of our hearts; let us applaud this admirable commerce of benefits and reſpect, which ſhe has eſtabliſhed for the conſolation of human kind, between the wants of the Grateful, and the Great, abundantly repaid for all their

ſervices, by a ſimple tribute of gratitude. In this amiable interchange all is pure, fruitful in virtuous actions, powerful in goodneſs as long as it runs uninterrupted in it's natural channel. But if the court ſeizes upon it, it can then only regard the public eſteem, as an adulterated coin, debaſed by the alloy of a ſhameful monopoly: from the abuſe which is inſtantly made of it, the moſt audacious immorality proceeds, and in it's impetuoſity overflows every claſs of citizens——The enſigns of diſtinction are beſtowed unworthily, and they confuſe and diſtract the ſentiment; this ſentiment, indeed, becomes completely corrupted by the alliance into which it is forced: for how is it poſſible that it ſhould eſcape the poiſon of thoſe vices, with which it becomes commonly connected? Amongſt the ſmall number of enlightened people, this ſentiment of eſteem and reſpect retires to the bottom of the heart, indignant at the diſgraceful charac-

ter which it is required to aſſume. There is but one ſpecies of real eſteem, and yet it's language, it's character, it's appearance, are ſtill employed in ſociety for the purpoſe of proſtituting falſe public honours to court ſycophants, to favourites, and but too often to the moſt flagitious of mankind.

In this diſorder of manners, genius is perſecuted, and virtue is turned into ridicule; and on the other hand a heap of enſigns, ribbands, decorations, ſtrangely figured, imperiouſly command reſpect and homage to be paid to mediocrity, to meanneſs, and even to crimes. How is it poſſible that dignities conferred in this manner ſhould not extinguiſh the ſparks of real honour, corrupt the public opinion, and degrade the mind?

In vain would you pretend, that being virtuous yourſelf, you will never confound the artful quack, or the profligate courtier,

with the good ſervant that prefers juſt claims to public rewards: experience in this reſpect evinces your numerous errors; and after all you muſt confeſs, that thoſe whom you have enrolled in your parchment honours, may, in the courſe of time, degenerate in ſentiment and eſteem; they will continue, however, to exact and attract the homage of the multitude; it will be then for ſome unworthy citizens, marked, perhaps, by our juſt contempt, that you have irrevocably alienated a portion of the public conſideration*. It is not ſo with reſpect to the eſteem which flows from the public, and which is neceſſarily free, this retires as ſoon as merit ceaſes, ſtill purer in its ſource, more natural in its motions, and alſo more certain in its courſe, and conſequently more

* To the Sejani, to the Tigellini, to the Mortimers, to the Spencers, to the Villars, to the —— —— —— —— —— and to the long and diſgraceful catalogue of favourites and corrupt miniſters.

ſalutary in effect; it is the only prize proportioned to the ſoul of the virtuous citizen, the only one proper to inſpire good actions, and not to inflame the thirſt of vanity and pride; the only one that may be ſought, that may be attained, without meanneſs. Once more, permit the citizens to diſtribute their reſpect according to their feelings, and give themſelves up to that expreſſion, ſo flattering, ſo encouraging, that they give it as by inſpiration, and you will then ſee in the free concourſe of all thoſe men, who are poſſeſſed of energetic minds, efforts multiplied in every ſpecies of good, which ought to conduce to the advancement of ſocial perfection, the great ſource of public eſteem*.

* I ſpeak particularly of a nation which is free; or one that wiſhes to become ſo. It is certain that the diſtribution of public honours cannot be veſted in a nation of ſlaves: amongſt people who are ſlaves, the moral coin is always adulterated, be the hand what it may that diſtributes it. *Auth.*

But your inſolence and your vanity are better pleaſed with Privileges; it is then but too plain, that you wiſh rather to be diſtinguiſhed *from* your fellow-citizens, than *by* your fellow-citizens*.

* Should even this diſtinction be accuſed of being rather metaphyſical, a word which of late has become ſo alarming to inattentive minds. I will, however, aſſert that the diſtinction marked by the word *from* is a real difference; it belongs indeed to both the terms at the ſame time; becauſe if *A* is diſtinguiſhed from *B*, it is clear, for the ſame reaſon, that *B* will be diſtinguiſhed from *A*, conſequently *A* and *B* are upon an equal footing. All individuals, all beings, muſt need be different, one from the other; there is no great matter of pride where every perſon would have an equal title. In Nature, ſuperiority and inferiority are not matters of right, but of fact; this advantage ſuppoſes in truth, greater power on one ſide than on the other; but, if we enquire into the original claim and title, to whom do you imagine this ſuperiority ultimately belongs? to the body of citizens, or to the few privileged perſons? The diſtinction marked by the word *by*, on the contrary, is the moſt ſocial principle, the moſt fruitful in good actions, and good morals; but this diſtinction muſt be enthroned in the ſoul of thoſe that grant it, and not placed in the hand of one individual that pretends to the diſtribution. If it is a ſentiment on their part, it cannot be any thing elſe without ceaſing to be

Here then is manifeſted this ſecret ſentiment, this unnatural appetite, ſo full of vanity, and yet ſo mean in itſelf, that you are endeavouring to conceal it, under the appearance of public intereſt. It is not the eſteem or the love of your fellow-citizens to which you aſpire, on the contrary, you are only alive to the ſentiments of a culpable vanity, which is hoſtile to mankind, with the natural equality of whom you are offended.

You are offended in the inmoſt receſſes of your heart; you are reproaching Nature, that *ſhe* has not placed your fellow-citizens in ſome inferior claſſes, deſtined for your ſervice only, methinks I hear you exclaim.

true. It muſt be avowed, alſo, that this ſentiment is eſſentially free, and that there muſt be extreme folly in any perſon whatever to pretend to diſpoſe of my eſteem and veneration without my conſent.

Auth.

Why does not all the world ſhare with me my indignation? Truly, you are very far from having any perſonal intereſt in the queſtion which now occupies our attention, and which treats of the rewards due to merit, and not the puniſhments, which, in a well-regulated ſtate, ought to be inflicted on the enemies of ſocial felicity.

From theſe conſiderations, let us proceed to the effects of honorary Privileges, whether involved in the public intereſt, or the intereſt of the privileged themſelves.

From the moment that the agents of a court imprint the character of Privilege on a citizen, they open his mind to a particular intereſt, and cloſe it more or leſs againſt the common good: the idea of country ſhrinks in the heart of the privileged, and becomes limited to the claſs into which he is adopted. All his efforts, hitherto em-

ployed in the ſervice of the common weal, are turned againſt it; the profeſſed intention of the Privilege was to incite him to better actions, but it has ſucceeded only in depraving him. His heart is then agitated with a deſire of being firſt, with an inſatiable thirſt of domination. This deſire, unfortunately too agreeable to human nature, is a true anti-ſocial malady; and, from its very nature, it muſt always be detrimental; judge then of its ravages, when opinion and the laws of a country conſpire to lend it their power and ſupport.

For a moment inſpect the ſentiments of a perſon newly privileged; he looks on himſelf and his colleagues, as forming a ſeparate order, a choſen nation within the nation; he conſiders in the firſt place, what he owes to his own CAST; he imagines that he is devoted to his own particular party; and if he continues to trouble himſelf about

others, it is about ſuch as no longer deſerve to be termed *others*; they are his own friends, connexions and companions.

The people is no longer that body of which he was a member; it is nothing but the *people*, the people who in his heart and in his language are "Nobody*," or, as Mr. Burke calls them, the "ſwiniſh multitude,"

* It may, perhaps, appear ſcarcely neceſſary to remind the Engliſh reader, that our author ſpeaks here of the former nobility of France, Germany, and ſome parts of Italy where in fact the other people are conſidered as an inferior ſpecies of mortals: no man acquainted with the manners of this country, can make ſuch a miſtake. The nobles here are obliged to conſider every man as their fellow ſubject, and cannot think of oppreſſing or inſulting any individual of any rank; but there was a time, when the barons treated with the moſt ſovereign contempt the humble commoners. Doctor Henry, in his Hiſtory of Great Britain, gives an example of the awe in which the Commons ſtood of the Lords; ſo remarkable, that though very long, I cannot omit inſerting it.

Tranſ.

the mere ſcum of the earth, created on purpoſe to ſerve him, whilſt he himſelf is born

" The houſe of commons, even after it was fully eſtabliſhed, acted with much modeſty and diffidence, and ſeems to have ſtood in awe of the king and the houſe of lords. Of this many examples might be produced; but the following one will probably be thought ſufficient. One Thomas Haxey, a clergyman, and a member of the houſe of commons in that parliament, which met at Weſtminſter, Jan. 21, A. D. 1397, propoſed to the conſideration of the houſe, a law for reducing the expences of the king's houſehold, and preventing too great a number of biſhops and ladies from reſiding at court. The king being informed of this propoſal, was much incenſed, and ſending for the peers, told them, that he underſtood there was a bill brought into the houſe of commons, intrenching upon their prerogatives and royalties, which his predeceſſors had enjoyed, and which he was determined to maintain; and commanded the lords, ſpiritual and temporal, to acquaint the commons with this determination, and to charge their ſpeaker, Sir John Buſſy, upon his allegiance, to deliver up the bill, with the name of the perſon who had brought it into the houſe. When the commons received the meſſage, they came before the king in full parliament, delivered up the obnoxious bill, with the name of the author, and expreſſed the deepeſt concern, that they had offended his majeſty, moſt humbly praying him to excuſe them,

ſolely to command and to enjoy. It is an abſolute fact, that the nobility look upon themſelves as

'For that it never was their intent to ſpeak, ſhew, or act any thing which ſhould be an offence, or give diſpleaſure to his majeſty.' The king was graciouſly pleaſed to except of their excuſe; but the houſe of lords condemned Mr. Haxey to die the death of a traitor. And this moſt cruel ſentence would moſt probably have been executed upon him, if he had not been a clergyman. But the archbiſhop of Canterbury, with all the other prelates, fell on their knees before the king, and moſt earneſtly begged his life, and the cuſtody of his body, which they obtained." *Henry's Hiſt. of Great Britain*, vol. viii. p. 163, 164.

By the way, theſe were the good old times of chivalry, the delight of Mr. Burke. Deprived in a great meaſure of this real ſuperiority, the Engliſh nobles do whatever they can to ſet off their titular diſtinctions. They, accordingly, omit no occaſion to diſplay their diſtinguiſhed rank; the famous ſymbol of nobility, the proud coronet, is the conſtant ornament of all their houſhold goods. It muſt appear ricículous to a ſtranger, or to a foreigner, to ſee on every great or little article, from the maſſy plate down to the tea-ſpoon, the favourite coronet engraved.

Tranſ.

another ſpecies of beings *. This opinion, in appearance ſo exaggerated, and which does not ſeem included in the notion of Privilege, inſenſibly becomes it's natural conſequence, and in the end eſtabliſhes itſelf in all minds. I ſhall put this queſtion to ſome frank and liberal nobleman, as ſuch it muſt be confeſſed there are, when he ſees a common man near him, who does not come for his protection, does he not generally feel an involuntary motion of repulſe, ready to break out upon the ſlighteſt pretext, either by ſome injurious expreſſion, or ſome offenſive geſture? The falſe ſentiment of perſonal ſuperiority is ſo dear to the privileged claſs, that they wiſh to extend it to all tranſactions with the citizens. They are not made to be confounded, they are not fit to

* As I do not wiſh to be accuſed of exaggeration, the reader may conſult at the end, an authentic paper, which I have extracted from the journals of the order of nobility, at the States General, in the year 1614.

Aut.

mix together; it would be wanting to one's ſelf eſſentially, to diſpute, or ſeem to be wrong, it is committing one's ſelf, even when in the right, with &c. &c.

Nothing is more curious in this reſpect, than the ſcene exhibited in countries remote from the capital; it is there the noble ſentiment of ſuperiority feeds and fattens unmoleſted by reaſon, and the commotions of crowded cities. In the ancient caſtles, the noble baron learns to reſpect himſelf much better, he may indulge his extacy for a longer time before the portraits of his anceſtors, and intoxicate himſelf at more leiſure with the honour of being deſcended from men, who exiſted in the thirteenth or fourteenth century; for he never ſuſpects that a ſimilar advantage can be common to all families: in his opinion it is a characteriſtic peculiar to a certain race: he frequently preſents with all poſſible modeſty to the ado-

ration of ſtrangers, this train of anceſtry; the ſight of whom has ſo often filled him with the moſt delightful viſions; but he does not reſt long upon his father or grandfather: the moſt diſtant anceſtors are the moſt eſteemed, in proportion to his vanity, they are the neareſt to his heart.

I have ſeen ſome of theſe large galleries of family pictures; they are not abſolutely valuable on account of the paintings, nor yet from the ſentiments of filial affection, but they are indebted for their ſublimity to the antiquity and manners of the good feudal times*.

* Who has not heard on thoſe occaſions the gentleman who exhibits it, make ſome charming reflexions, upon this man, who was in the twelfth century, a fine dog; his vaſſals had not a fair chance with him? Another (taking care that the ancient name is predominant) who having incautiouſly engaged in a conſpiracy, paid for it with his head; but all in the twelfth century. On this ſubject I muſt relate an anecdote of a lady, who, in a genteel party, violently exclaimed againſt the conduct,

In theſe caſtles it is that the true effect of a genealogical-tree, with unfolded leaves, and expanded branches, is felt; it is there that we diſcover, even in the moſt trifling circumſtance, what is the value of a man of birth, *un homme comme il faut*, and the rank* in which every man ought to be placed.

really criminal, of a gentleman of one of the firſt houſes in the kingdom; all on a ſudden, ſhe interrupted herſelf, and in a tone difficult to be deſcribed, added, "But I don't know why I ſhould ſpeak ſo ill of him, becauſe I have the honour to be related to the family."

* It is impoſſible to catch with accuracy the ſhades, the ſubtilties of the language uſed among the privileged gentry; for this purpoſe a dictionary would be neceſſary, which would at leaſt have novelty to recommend it; becauſe, inſtead of giving the direct or metaphyſical meaning of the words, the object on the contrary would be, to detach them as far as poſſible from their natural ſignification, to leave nothing beneath the ſound, but a complete vacuity of ſenſe, and the moſt unlimited ſcope for abſurdity and prejudice. In this dictionary we ſhould find what it is to be of a nobility which never had a be-

Compared with thoſe elevated ſituati-

ginning. Perſons of this ſpecies are of the right ſort; they are by the *grace* of God, very different from the herd of new nobility, that are ſo by the grace of the prince. Thoſe citizens are never taken into the account, who, without ſufficient intereſt to be promoted by the prince's mercy, are reduced to the neceſſity of diſtinguiſhing themſelves by their perſonal qualities: theſe are very nothings, they are only the nation! We ſhould learn from this new dictionary, that none are to be accounted really of a noble birth, but thoſe who have no origin; thoſe made nobles by the prince have only half a family; the reſt of the nation have none. It would be ſuperfluous to obſerve here, that the birth and family in queſtion, is not that which comes in a natural way from a father and mother, but that which the prince beſtows by virtue of a patent, ſigned with his ſign manual; or ſtill better, that which comes from nobody knows where, which is ſtill more valued. If, for inſtance, you have been ſo vulgar as to think that each man neceſſarily has a father, a grandfather, &c. you are miſtaken in this caſe, there is nothing authentic, but the atteſtation of Mr. *Cherin*. To be of an old family, you muſt be of the right race, which has no beginning. The new nobility are men of yeſterday, and as to the citizens who are not noble, I don't know what to ſay, but that apparently they are not born yet. I am aſtoniſhed at the ability with which the nobility prolong to an endleſs

ons †, how mean and contemptible muſt the perſons and occupations of the trading part

length, thoſe ſublime, though never ceaſing converſations; but the moſt entertaining of all, in my opinion, are thoſe who conſtantly fall on their knees to worſhip their own dignity, and laugh from their heart at the ſame abſurdity in others. I maintain that the opinions of the privileged order are in exact correſpondence with their feelings; and to give a farther proof of it, will now offer, according to their manner of eſtimating things, the real picture of a political ſociety. It is to conſiſt of ſix or ſeven claſſes, ſubordinate one to the other: in the firſt rank are the high and powerful nobility, *les grands ſeigneurs*, viz. that part of the court, in which high birth, exalted ſtation, and immenſe wealth are united: the ſecond claſs includes the *preſentés connus*, thoſe preſented at court whom every body knows (by the way it is very common in ſome of the people of faſhion, chiefly ladies, if they meet at any public place a number of genteel people, but not quite of the higheſt faſhion, to ſay, "There was *nobody* there one knows." I have heard it a hundred times) people of quality, *gens de qualité:* in the third rank comes thoſe preſented at court, that *nobody* knows, *preſentés inconnus:* in the fourth claſs of the non-preſented, *non preſenté*, are included thoſe who, however, may be of the *right ſort*, all the country nobility, *des gentillatres*, it is their expreſſion: to the fifth claſs are referred all the created nobility, a little ancient,

of the community appear! If we were allowed to inſtitute a compariſon, what is a

or men of nothing, *gens de néant:* in the ſixth claſs are packed together all the new nobility, or men leſs than nothing, *gens moins que rien:* laſtly, that nothing, however inſignificant, may be omitted, they will condeſcend to thruſt down in the ſeventh and laſt diviſion the reſt of the citizens, who it is not poſſible to characteriſe otherwiſe than by the moſt contemptuous appellations. This is the real ſocial order, the prevailing prejudice; and I am ſure I advance nothing new, unleſs to thoſe people, who are not at all in the world. *Author.*

† A great deal of this abſurd language continues to be applied in England to the nobility in many caſes, and eſpecially the offences of the preſs are accounted to be much more heinous againſt perſons of high rank, it is *ſcandalum magnatum.* Yes, in this ſuppoſed free country, the vices of the great may not only go unpuniſhed, but even the daring writer who ſhould point them out to the world, would be ſeverely puniſhed for it—even in the courtly time of the Roman republic, writers were not found wanting to laſh and expoſe the vices of the great.

Siquis erat dignus, deſcribi quod malus, aut fur,
Quod Mæchus foret, aut ſicarius, aut alioqui
Famoſus multa cum liberatate notabant. HOR.

yeoman, a tradeſman, or a merchant, compared with a nobleman of an ancient fami-

But in England, fine, impriſonment, and the pillory, await the unfortunate writer who ſhould dare to utter any thing that may reflect on the conduct or character of the great—no matter whether true or falſe—Nay, I am rather diſpoſed to think that truth is more puniſhable, becauſe then the character of the noble perſon may be really affected. As there is great uncertainty in the law of libels in Great Britain, both as to the nature of the offence, and the different puniſhments according to the rank of the offended, I think it would be an exceedingly beneficial law, for the free citizens of this country, for his majeſty's moſt loyal ſubjects, to fix the matter clearly, that every author ſhould know what he is about, when he is writing of a lord, a miniſter, or a commoner, in the ſame manner as it was enacted by the Saxon laws in England, a few centuries ago, that criminal offences ſhould be puniſhed in proportion to the rank. An accuraate writer of the Hiſtory of Great Britain, written upon a new plan, Doctor Henry, vol. iii. p. 316, tells us, *that by theſe laws, a certain price was ſet upon every man's life, from the ſovereign to the ſlave; this was called Weregyld.* Upon this principle might be founded this much wiſhed-for law for the puniſhment of libellous offences.

1ſt. An attack on any of the royal family: ſeven

ly? whoſe eyes are inceſſantly fixed upon the *good old times*; there he contemplates

years impriſonment, twice in the pillory, and a fine of 500 l.

2dly. A duke: two years impriſonment, pillory once, fine 100 l.

3dly. A miniſter: the ſame as a duke.

4thly. A member of the lower houſe; by the bye, a very pretty name; For the houſe of commons, the repreſentatives of a great nation—the lower houſe; low indeed! priſon one year, pillory once, fine 100 l.

5thly. A private individual: four or five months impriſonment, no pillory, and 40 or 50 l.

6thly. To dare to ſpeak of the intrigues of a lady of high rank: a year's impriſonment, fine and pillory.

7thly. Of a woman not of faſhion, though very likely as virtuous: a few months impriſonment, and 20 or 30 l. fine quite ſufficient, &c. according to the ſituation in life of the perſon attacked.

Theſe, perhaps, may be uſeful hints ſubject to great im-

his titles, his power. He may be ſaid to exiſt in his anceſtors: on the contrary, the tradeſman fixes his attention on the *ignoble preſent*, and the *indifferent future*; he prepares for the one, and ſuſtains the other by the reſources of his own induſtry. He, inſtead of *having been*, undergoes the labour; and, what is worſe, the ſcandal of employing his time, his talents, his continued efforts, in our immediate ſervice; he ſubmits to exiſt by his own induſtry, ſo neceſſary to us all, Ah! why cannot thoſe privileged beings return to the ages that are *paſt*, enjoy their titles, decorations, &c. and leave to the ſtupid nation the *ignoble preſent?*

The ſelf-complacency of a really ancient nobleman, bears an exact proportion to his

provement, for the bill on libels, lately poſtponed by the lords, for the farther conſideration of all the wiſe men of the nation. *Tranſ.*

contempt for others. He careſſes, he idolizes his perſonal dignity; and though all the efforts of this ſuperſtition are inſufficient to impart the leaſt ſhadow of reality to thoſe ridiculous errors, they do not on that account engage his attention the leſs, or the leſs fill up the vacancy of his mind; he gives himſelf up to thoſe deluſions with as much rapture, as the maniac of Piræus evinced for his chimera.

Vanity, which is generally ſelfiſh, and is gratified with being inſulated, here transforms itſelf, all at once, into an *Eſprit de corps*, or party ſpirit. If a member of the privileged claſs ſuſtains the ſmalleſt inconvenience from any part of that claſs which he deſpiſes, he is inſtantly inflamed; his paſſions ſwell beyond all bounds, he feels himſelf wounded in his deareſt prerogative; calls in every aſſiſtance; fans the ſparks of reſentment in his colleagues, ſucceeds in

forming a dreadful confederacy; ready to ſacrifice every thing for the maintenance and aggrandiſement of his odious prerogative. Thus it is that political order and decency are reverſed, and in their place we behold nothing but a deteſtable *Ariſtocracy*.

It may be ſaid, however, that in company the nobility are as polite to the non-privileged, as to one another. I am not the firſt who has remarked the characteriſtic politeneſs of the Gallic nation. The French nobleman does not treat them with politeneſs becauſe he thinks it is due to them, but becauſe he believes it due to himſelf. It is not the rights of others that he reſpects, but his own dignity; he will not be confounded by vulgar manners, with what he calls *bad company*. He would be under apprehenſions that the *Bourgeois* would take him for a common man like himſelf.

Be on your guard, my fellow-citizens, againſt thoſe ſeductive grimaces. Have the good ſenſe to draw the veil aſide, and you will perceive underneath it thoſe haughty attributes of nobility which we ought to deteſt.

To account for this ardent thirſt of acquiring titles, it may be thought perhaps, that a ſpecies of peculiar felicity has been created for the nobility, at the expence of public happineſs, in the ſupreme delight of that ſuperiority, enjoyed by a ſmall number, to which a greater aſpire, and of which the reſt are reduced to revenge themſelves by recurring to the reſourſes of envy and hatred.

But can it be forgotten, that Nature never impoſes vain or impotent laws; that ſhe has determined to diſtribute happineſs to man only in that ſtate of equality; and that

which is offered by vanity is a treacherous exchange for that multitude of natural ſentiments which form the component part of ſubſtantial happineſs*?

* Nothing can be more true than what our author here aſſerts, that in the eaſy and unreſtrained intercourſe between equals, conſiſts the charm of ſocial converſation and conviviality.

There no pedant forms await,
No proud reſerve ſhuts up the gate,
No ſpleen, no party views controul
That warm benevolence of ſoul,
Which prompts the friendly generous heart,
Regardleſs of each venal art;
Regardleſs of the world's acclaim.
Draw freely nigh, and welcome find,
If not the coſtly, yet the kind. SHENSTONE.

And nothing, on the contrary, can be more inſipid, than the ſtately aſſemblies of thoſe who are called the Great.

Tremendous pomp, where hate, diſtruſt and fear,
In kindred boſoms diſſolve the ſocial tie;
There not the parent's ſmile is half ſincere,
Nor void of art the conſort's melting eye;

Let us attend to our own experience †, let us direct our view to that of the nobility

> There with the friendly wiſh, the kindly flame,
> No face is brightened, and no boſoms beat;
> Youth, manhood, age, avow one ſordid aim,
> And even the beardleſs lip eſſays deceit. *Tranſ.*

† Society affords to all whoſe fate has not condemned them to unremitting labour, an inexpreſſible ſource of pure and agreeable enjoyments; this we feel, and it is generally agreed upon, that the people who believe themſelves the moſt civiliſed, alſo boaſt of having the beſt ſociety: where then is the beſt ſociety to be found? There certainly where men, who being ſuited one to another, can aſſemble freely; and where thoſe who are not ſuited to each other, may ſeparate without any obſtacle. There where, in a given number of men there is a majority poſſeſſing the talent and ſpirit of ſociety, and where the choice is not compelled by any conſideration foreign to the end propoſed in aſſembling together, can it now be ſaid that the prejudices of rank do not oppoſe this ſimple arrangement? How many women of faſhion, having families, are obliged to renounce the company of men, the moſt agreeable, leſt a mixt company ſhould offend the pride of rank? You do well to declaim in your ſocieties, ſo ſelect and ſo inſipid againſt this equality, of which you cannot help feeling the abſolute neceſſity. It is not in a ſhort ſpace of a few moments that men can ſeriouſly mould

themſelves, and the great mandataries or pubilc officers, whoſe department in the provinces enables them to enjoy the fancied charms of ſuperiority; which ſpreads all her charms for them in it. They, however, ſoon find themſelves alone; their minds fatigued and exhauſted with liſtleſneſs, and thus the violated rights of Nature are avenged: obſerve the impatience with which they return to meet with *equal* ſociety in the metropolis: how abſurd then is it continually to ſow and cultivate the ſeeds of vanity, to reap only the thorns of pride, and the poppies of *ennui!*

We are far from wiſhing to confound with the abſurd and chimerical ſuperiority, which is the effect of excluſive Privileges,

themſelves ſo as to become ſociety for each other, which they certainly would be, if equality was the daily practice of our lives, rather than the ſport of a few moments. This matter preſents itſelf in ſo many points of view, that I have only inſtanced a very few. *Author.*

that legal ſuperiority which divides mankind into two claſſes, the governors and the governed: this is real and neceſſary, it neither fills the one party with pride, nor debaſes the other. It is a ſuperiority of employments, not of perſons: now, ſince even this ſuperiority cannot compenſate for the enjoyments of equality, what muſt we think of the chimera with which privileged perſons delude themſelves?

If men conſulted their own intereſt, if they knew how to purſue their proper happineſs, if they would conſent at leaſt to open their eyes to the lamentable imprudence, which has taught them to prefer the ſenſeleſs Privileges of ſervitude to the rights of free citizens, how would they haſten to abjure the numerous vanities in which they have been trained up from infancy! How would they miſtruſt an order of things ſo aptly calculated to combine with deſpot-

iſm! The rights of citizens embrace all; Privilege deſtroys every thing valuable, and affords nothing in return, except amongſt ſlaves.

Hitherto I have made no diſtinction between the different kinds of Privileges, between thoſe that are hereditary, and thoſe obtained by the perſon himſelf who poſſeſſes them: it is not but that they are all equally pernicious, equally dangerous in the ſocial ſtate. If there are degrees in the order of evils and abſurdities, the hereditary evils ought certainly to be placed in the firſt rank; and I ſhall not degrade my reaſon to prove a truth, which is ſelf-evident in itſelf, viz. That to make a Privilege a tranſmiſſive property, is to take away the feeble pretexts by which it is attempted to be ſupported. It is an overturning of all principle, and of all reaſon.

Some additional obſervations will reflect

freſh light on the pernicious effects of Privileges. But before we proceed, let us remark a general truth, which is, that perſonal intereſt, ſupported by the example of ages, is all that is neceſſary to give force and effect to any falſe notion. In the pernicious proceſs of corrupting the underſtanding, from one prejudice to another, we fall inſenſibly at length into a ſyſtem which exhibits the laſt extreme of folly; and, what is ſtill more mortifying, it becomes impoſſible to produce the leaſt alteration in the credulous ſuperſtition of nations.

Thus we behold (without the ſmalleſt effort on the part of the nation to reclaim its own imprudent conceſſions) innumerable ſwarms of the privileged race daily ariſe, under a ſtrong and almoſt religious perſuaſion, that they have acquired, by birth alone, a right to public honours; and, by the continuance of their exiſtence, a claim to a

portion of homage from the people: and theſe circumſtances conſtitute in their eyes a ſufficient title.

It is not enough, in effect, that the nobility look on themſelves as another ſpecies of men—No, they actually conſider themſelves and their deſcendants as a ſomething of which the nation ſtands abſolutely in need. They would not be content with being conſidered as the agents or officers of the *common-wealth*; for, in this reſpect, they would be debaſed to the ſituation of the generality of the public mandataries or ſervants of the ſtate, from whatever claſs they may be taken. It is in the capacity of a privileged or noble claſs of perſonages, that they look on themſelves as neceſſary to the exiſtence of ſociety under a monarchical government. If they ſpeak to the monarch himſelf, they never fail to repreſent themſelves as the prop of the throne, and

his natural champions againſt the people. If, on the other hand, they condeſcend to addreſs themſelves to the nation, they exhibit themſelves as the true defenders of the people; who, but for them, would be immediately cruſhed by the weighty hand of royalty.

With a little better information, government might ſee, that all which is wanted in ſociety, is, that the citizens ſhould merely live and act under the protection of the law, and a tutelary authority; whoſe duty it is to watch over and protect the ſtate. The only gradation of rank neceſſary, exiſts among thoſe who adminiſter the public affairs; it is there the gradation of power ſhould be ſought; it is there the relation of ſuperior and inferior ſhould be found; becauſe the public machine can only be moved and directed by means of this correſpondence.

Except thoſe who are immediately engaged in the functions of government, all are citizens equal in the eye of the law; all dependent, not one claſs upon another, for that would be an uſeleſs and intolerable ſervitude, but on the authority that protects, judges, and defends them. The man who poſſeſſes immenſe property, is no more than he who lives by his daily labour. If the rich man contributes more to the exigency of the ſtate, he has more property to be protected; but, ſhould the *little all* of the poor man be the leſs precious, and ought not his perſon to repoſe under the ſhade at leaſt of an equal protection?

It is by confounding theſe notions, ſo ſimple in themſelves, that nobility ſtill ſpeaks of the neceſſity of a ſubordination, foreign to that which ſubjects us to government and law. The military ſpirit would exalt itſelf into the judge of civil

relations, and conſider a nation only as an extenſive barrack. In a late publication the writer has even preſumed to eſtabliſh a compariſon betwixt the officers and privates on one ſide, and the privileged and non-privileged on the other. If you conſult the monaſtic ſpirit which has much analogy, with the military, you will immediately hear that there can be no order or government in a nation, until it has ſubmitted to that maſs of regulations, by the aid of which, the numerous victems to monaſteries are held in ſubordination. The monaſtic ſpirit, under a more ſpecious and more reſpectable name, has greater influence in ſociety than is generally imagined.

Let us ſpeak out plainly, and at once—Such narrow, contracted, miſerable views of things can only belong to men who neither reſpect nor feel the real bonds that connect

man in the ſocial ſtate. A citizen, whoever he may be, who does not fill a public office, is entirely at liberty to apply himſelf to the melioration of his lot in life, and to the enjoyment of his natural rights, provided he does not infringe the rights of another; that is, provided he commits no breach of the law. All the relations between citizen and citizen are founded on the baſis of freedom and equality; one gives his time or his merchandiſe, the other in return his money. There is no ſubordination, but a continual exchange‡.

‡ It will probably facilitate the communication of our ideas on this ſubject to diſtinguiſh the two ſpecies of hierarchy of which we have now been treating, by the names of *real* and *falſe*. The gradation between the governors and the obedience of the governed, to the various degrees of legal authority form the *true* hierarchy which is neceſſary in all ſocieties: that of the governed amongſt themſelves is *falſe*, uſeleſs, odious, and the unenlightened remains of the feudal ſyſtem. To form an idea of ſubordination amongſt the governed, we muſt imagine an armed troop poſſeſſing themſelves of a country, becoming the ſole pro-

If, in your narrow policy, you diſtinguiſh a body of citizens, by placing them be-

prietors of it, and preſerving for the common ſecurity the relative habits of military diſcipline. In this ſituation government is melted away in the civil eſtate; it is not any longer compoſed of a people, it is an army. With us, on the contrary, the different branches of the public power exiſt ſeparately, and are organized, including a great armed force, in ſuch a manner as to require from ſimple citizens, nothing but contributions to defray the public expence. Let us not be deceived in the midſt of all theſe phraſes of *ſubordination*, *dependency*, &c. which the nobility ſo loudly claim for themſelves. It is not the intereſts of true ſubordination to which they are attending, they only think of the *falſe*; it is that which they want to exalt on the ruins of the *true*. Hear them when they ſpeak of the ordinary agents of government; obſerve with what contempt a really old nobleman thinks proper to treat them; what do they ſee in a *lieutenant de police*, a juſtice of the peace, a man of no importance, a mere nothing, eſtabliſhed only to frighten the people, and who has not a right to intermeddle with *perſons of rank?* The example which I have juſt recited, falls within the obſervation of all. Let it be plainly declared, whether there is any noblemen who thinks himſelf under the juriſdiction of a lieutenant of the police? In what manner do they look upon the other ordinary agents of government, except the military commanders? Is it uncommon to

tween the government and the people, either this body will ſhare the functions of government, and then it is not the privileged claſs of which we are ſpeaking, or it will poſſeſs none of the eſſential functions of public power; and then I wiſh they would explain to me, what this intermediate body can be, other than a pernicious excreſſence. Pernicious either by intercepting the direct communications between the governors and the governed, preſſing on the ſprings of the public machine; or, at beſt, becoming, by all that diſtinguiſhes it from the great body of citizens, an additional burthen upon the community.

hear them ſay, "I am not made to ſubmit myſelf to the miniſter, if the king had done me the honour of giving his orders, well, &c?" I leave this ſubject to the imagination, or rather to the experience of the reader; but it was neceſſary to obſerve, that the real enemies to ſubordination and true hierarchy, are thoſe very men who urge ſubmiſſion with ſo much ardour to the *falſe one*.

Author.

All claſſes of citizens have their functions, their particular taſks, employments, which collectively form the general movements of ſociety. If there is any claſs that pretends to exempt itſelf from this general rule, it is eaſy to perceive that it is not likely to remain content with being uſeleſs, but that it muſt of neceſſity exiſt at the expence of the reſt.

What are the two great principles of action in ſociety? *Honour* and *emolument*. It is from the deſire we have of the one or of the other that ſociety is maintained: theſe two ſprings of action ſhould not be ſeparated in a nation, where the value of good morals and manners is known. The ambition of being found worthy of the public eſteem, (and every profeſſion may be entitled to a portion of it) will be found to operate as a neceſſary check on the inordinate love of wealth. Let us now examine how theſe

two different ſentiments are modified in the privileged claſs.

In the firſt place honour is aſſigned to them as their inheritance, or *appenage*; all other citizens are entitled to it only as the reward of their conduct; but to the nobility it is enough to *be born*; it is not enough for them to feel the neceſſity of acquiring honour; and, as they are born with it, they may renounce the purſuit of it, and leave it to others to obtain it by merit; they may reſingn it with ſafety to all that preſs forward to merit it*.

As to money, the nobility, it is true, feel the greateſt want of it; they are ever more expoſed to the influence of this paſſion, becauſe the falſe opinion of their ſu-

* Here it muſt be underſtood, that we do not confound *honour* with the *point of honour*; which has ſometimes been obtruded as it's ſubſtitute.

periority continually urges them to enlarge their expences; and in graſping at every thing that may contribute to that end, they are not reſtrained, like other men, by the fear of loſing all their honour and conſideration.

But, by a ſingular contradiction, while the prejudice of rank continually impels to the derangement of fortune, it imperiouſly cuts off all the honeſt means by which it might be repaired.

What modes then are left to the nobility, of gratifying this love of riches, which muſt neceſſarily influence them more than others? *Intrigue* and *ſolicitation*. Intrigue and mendicity will conſtitute the whole induſtry of this claſs. In the exerciſe of theſe two employments, they reſume, in ſome meaſure, their place among the active and labouring part of ſociety.

If they dedicate themſelves entirely to theſe purſuits, they will excel in them, conſequently you may be ſure, whenever this double talent may be practiſed with ſucceſs, that noble families will qualify themſelves in ſuch a degree, as to exclude all competition on the part of the non-privileged.

They will fill the court, beſiege miniſters, monopolize all favours, penſions, church-preferments; intrigue, will caſt at once an uſurping eye at the church, the ſword, and the law: in them it diſcovers a conſiderable revenue, or a power which leads to it: this power, which is attached to a multitude of places, immediately cauſes thoſe places to be conſidered as lucrative ſinecures, eſtabliſhed, not for the purpoſe of exerciſing talents or induſtry, but merely to inſure comfortable ſettlements for noble families.

Theſe experienced men will not depend entirely on their ſuperiority in the art of intriguing; but, as if they dreaded that the love of the public welfare ſhould, in ſome moment of infatuation, ſeduce the miniſter from their party, they will reſolve to profit in time by the incapacity or treachery of miniſters, till in the end they obtain a ſanction to their monopoly, by ſome ſecure edicts, or by a ſyſtem of adminiſtration, equivalent to an excluſive law.

Thus it is, that the ſtate becomes devoted to principles deſtructive of all public œconomy. It has a right in all things to prefer the moſt able, and the leaſt expenſive ſervants. The monopoly commands the choice of the moſt extravagant, and the leaſt able, ſince it is this intereſt of the monopoly to ſtop the exertions of ability, which, in a free ſtate, would be ever active in the public ſervice.

Noble beggary is leſs fraught with inconveniency to the common-wealth; in every view it is a paraſitic branch that abſorbs all the juices; but does not at leaſt pretend to replace the uſeful boughs: like every other ſpecies of mendicity, it ſtretches out the hand in order to excite compaſſion, and to receive gratuitouſly: it is only the poſture, which is leſs humble; it ſeems rather to dictate a duty, than to implore relief.

It has been ſufficient to impart a kind of falſe dignity to intrigue and beggary, that they have been particularly practiſed by noble perſonages: thus almoſt every man is found to boaſt of his ſucceſs in theſe ſo really deſpicable arts. They inſpire emulation, they excite envy, but never contempt.

This ſpecies of mendicity is principally exerciſed at court, where the moſt power-

ful and the moſt opulent make the beſt advantage of it.

From that fountain of corruption the contagious example winds it's way to the moſt diſtant receſſes of the provinces, and imparts to all the *honourable* and *virtuous* deſire of living in idleneſs at the expence of the Public. It is not enough to obviate theſe objections, to aſſert, that beyond all compariſon, the order of nobility is the moſt opulent in the kingdom; that the bulk of the land, and all the overgrown fortunes, belong to the members of this claſs. The love of expence, and the pleaſure of ruining themſelves, are ſuperior to all the riches in the world; and there muſt of courſe be at leaſt ſome noble beggars.

The word *poor* is never heard united with that of *nobleman*, but a cry of indignation is immediately raiſed. A nobleman with-

out an eſtate to ſupport his name and his rank, is a diſgrace to the nation! we muſt haſten to remedy this public diſorder; and though ſupplies be not publicly demanded for that expreſs purpoſe in the budget of the miniſter, it is but too true, that if the national accounts were but nicely inſpected, a conſiderable part of the public expenditure would be found to have been diſtributed in this way.

It is not for nothing that adminiſtration is chiefly compoſed of perſons of conſiderable families. No, this adminiſtration thus compoſed, watches, with a paternal ſolicitude, over all the intereſts of the privileged. Here (in France) we have even pompous eſtabliſhments for the education of the poor nobility of both ſexes. It is in vain that the order of Providence, by it's freedom, reproaches the folly of your inſtitutions; it would bring back thoſe, who are in want,

to the general law of Nature, that of labouring for their bread; but you diſcern nothing in this wiſe order, but an error of deſtiny, and you take care not to give to your pupils the habits of a laborious profeſſion capable of yielding a ſubſiſtence.

In your admirable ſyſtem you proceed even ſo far as to inſpire them with a ſort of pride in having ſo early ſubſiſted on the bounty of the Public; as if it was more glorious and honourable to have been maintained by alms, than to have been above the neceſſity of receiving them.

You reward thoſe titled gentry beſides with pecuniary gifts, penſions, ribbands, for having been reduced to the neceſſity of receiving this firſt pledge of your tenderneſs.

Whilſt even in a ſtate of infancy the young nobility claim rank and appoint-

ments; and if they happen to be poor, their beggary is loudly lamented. Look amongſt the non-privileged, of the ſame age, deſtined for profeſſions which require ability and ſtudy; look if there be any one of them, who, though trained to a laborious employment, does not coſt his parents a conſiderable ſum before he can be admitted to the uncertain chance of deriving even a neceſſary ſubſiſtence from his long labours.

Every door is thrown open to the ſolicitation of the nobility: it is ſufficient for them juſt to appear, and every one imagines he does himſelf an honour by intereſting himſelf in their advancement. Each member of adminiſtration looks on their fortunes as inſeparably connected with his own: yes, government has ſecretly contributed a thouſand times to the ſettlement and aggrandiſement of their families.

Even their treaties of marriage are conſidered as affairs of public importance. Places are created on purpoſe for them; exchanges are negociated to accommodate them; and this has ſometimes been effected by conſiderable, though ſecret, diſburſements from the public treaſury.

Thoſe noblemen, who cannot aſpire to theſe high favours, find abundant reſources elſewhere, in religious inſtitutions, for both ſexes. In a multitude of military ranks, and orders, without uſe or object; or if they have any object, ſuch as is pernicious and unjuſt, in penſions, prebends, governments, and honourable ſinecures. And, as if the errors of our anceſtors were not enough, government has been occupied for ſome years paſt with redoubled ardour, in augmenting a number of thoſe brilliant but uſeleſs employments*.

* A ſtrange contradiction is manifeſt in the conduct of

It would be an error to ſuppoſe that the privileged beggars deſpiſe little opportunities or petty aſſiſtance. The funds ſet apart for the royal alms are, in a great meaſure, abſorbed by them: and to ſay that a noble perſon is poor, is not intended to convey an idea that he has not enough to ſupply all his natural wants; but, that his vanity ſuffers, and that is enough. Thus the real indigence of each claſs of citizens is ſacrificed to the inſatiate cravings of vanity.

government; on the one hand it declaims moſt vehemently againſt the wealth which is conſecrated to the worſhip of the divinity, which, at leaſt, exempts the national purſe from the diſcharge of this branch of the public ſervice; but at the ſame time endeavours, with all it's might, to appropriate that wealth and more to the nobility, who render no public ſervice at all. It is curious to read the liſt of chapters lately created, or devoted to the uſe of the *nobleſſe* of both ſexes; and it would be ſtill more curious, if we could develope the ſecret motives which have ſhamefully led to the corruption of eccleſiaſtical foundations; which, if they are to be modified, ought to be ſo, for an intereſt truly national, and by the nation itſelf alone.

Author.

In reviewing the earlier pages of hiſtory, we obſerve the nobility in the habit of uſurping by force, whatever they pleaſed. Violence and rapine, conſcious of impunity, were doubtleſs ſufficient without ſoliciting alms. This privileged mendicity, of courſe, could only have commenced with the firſt dawn of public order; which evinces, that it is different in it's nature from beggary of the people. This laſt ſpecies of poverty grows with the corruption of the government; but the other increaſes in proportion as the government is improved. It is true, that after ſome further progreſs in the arts of government, both of theſe ſocial evils will probably ceaſe; but this can never be effected by cheriſhing and feeding them, and much leſs by honouring that which is by far the moſt inexcuſable of the two.

It cannot be denied, but there is conſi-

derable addreſs in obtaining from compaſſion what cannot at preſent be wreſted from weakneſs; and in profiting ſometimes, by the audacity of the oppreſſor, and ſometimes by the ſenſibility of the oppreſſed. The nobility have certainly diſtinguiſhed themſelves in both ways: from the inſtant that rank could no longer obtain what it wanted by force, it adopted a new plan, and loſt no opportunity of imploring the liberality of the king and of the nation.

The minutes of the *ancient States General*, thoſe of the old aſſemblies of the Notables, are loaded with petitions in favour of the *poor nobility**.

* Now that the principles of general juſtice are more diffuſed, and that the aſſemblies of the bailliages, will have objects of great magnitude to diſcuſs, it may undoubtedly be hoped, that they will not ſully their inſtructions with what might formerly be called, the *beggarly couplet*. *Author.*

The *pays-d'eſtats* have been employed a long time, and always with an additional zeal, in every thing that can augment the number of penſions, which they have aſſigned to the poor nobility.

The provincial adminiſtrations already follow theſe honourable ſteps; and the three orders in common, becauſe they are ſtill entirely compoſed of nobility, on every occaſion attend with the moſt reſpectful approbation to all the advices which are ſent to them relative to the needy claſs of the privileged.

The intendants of provinces have procured particular funds for this purpoſe; and to inſure their own ſucceſs in every thing, nothing more is neceſſary than to ſhew themſelves warmly intereſted in the diſtreſſes of the poor nobility.

In ſhort, in books, in pulpits, academies, diſcourſes, in converſations, if you wiſh to intereſt your hearers, it is only to ſpeak of the poor nobility. When we obſerve this general infatuation, and the innumerable methods which ſuperſtition (to which nothing is impoſſible) has taken to relieve the needy nobleman, it is difficult to aſſign a reaſon, why there has not yet been fixed on the church door a box for the *poor diſtreſſed nobility*.

It may be neceſſary in this place to notice an inexhauſtible kind of traffic which has been carried on by the nobility; it is founded in the one part on the ſuperſtition of names, and in the other upon a ſpecies of covetouſneſs, which is ſtill more powerful than vanity. I ſpeak of what is imprudently termed *miſalliances**, though this

* It would be proper, at leaſt for the decency of language, to make uſe of another word, to deſign the action

expreſſion has not been ſufficient to diſcourage the ſtupid citizens, who pay ſo dear for an inſult immediately offered to themſelves.

of giving the hand to the rich offering of ſtupidity; there ought to be a word, which would mark more clearly on which ſide the miſalliance lies. *Author.*

This ſource of riches is not leſs copious to the nobility in England, than it was in France: let any perſon make the obſervation upon the marriage of heireſſes of fortune, and he will find, that about eight or nine out of ten go from the city to St. James's. How many beautiful villas, purchaſed by many years toil and labour, are tranſferred from induſtrious and ſober families, to increaſe the riches of an overgrown one, or to fill up the vacancies of ſome ruined nobleman? But here few ladies are to be found of ſo firm a mind as to reſiſt the faſcinations of a coronet, the pleaſing ſound of "Lady ſuch-a-one's carriage ſtops the way!" or the all-conquering charms of precedence.

Flavia in vain has wit and charms,
And all that ſhines, and all that warms;
In vain all human race adore her,
For lady Mary ranks before her.

SHENSTONE.
Author.

As ſoon as any of the lower order, by the mere effort of induſtry, have made a fortune, as ſoon as the agents of public revenue have accumulated treaſures by eaſier means, the nobility immediately ſet their hearts on thoſe riches. It appears indeed, that our unfortunate nation is condemned to work, and toil, and exhauſt themſelves without ceaſing to gratify the inſatiable avarice of the nobility.

Agriculture, manufactures, and the arts attempt in vain, either to ſupport or aggrandize themſelves; in vain would they dedicate to the property of the public a portion of the immenſe capitals to which they have contributed. The rapacious nobility devour all. All is devoted without any return to the barren and ungrateful region of nobility ||.

|| Honour is ſaid to be the principle of monarchy, it muſt be acknowledged at leaſt that France has for a long time made dreadful ſacrifices to fortify herſelf in this principle.

The ſubjects of privileges are as unexhauſtible as the prejudices which conſpire to ſupport them. But let us quit this topic, and ſpare ourſelves the reflection which it ſuggeſts; the time will come when our indignant poſterity, amazed at the peruſal of our hiſtory will ſtamp our unparalleled humanity with that opprobrium which it juſtly deſerves.

In our younger days we have ſeen men of letters diſtinguiſh themſelves by their courage, in attacking prejudices, equally ſtrong and equally diſgraceful to humanity, at this day their ſucceſſors repeat in their writings and converſation, antiquated reaſonings againſt prejudice, which no longer exiſts. The prejudice which ſupports privilege is the moſt pernicious that ever affected the earth, it is more intimately connected with the ſocial organization than any other, it corrupts it more deeply, and

it intereſts a far greater number in its defence. How numerous are the motives which concur in this ſubject to excite the zeal of true patriotiſm, and to abaſh and confound the indolence of our cotemporary writers!

EXTRACT from the Proceſs Verbal of the Order of Nobility to the States General in 1614, page 113.

Tueſday 25th of November, having had an audience, M. de Senecey addreſſed the King in the following manner.

SIRE,

THE goodneſs of our Kings has at all times granted a liberty to their nobility to report to them on very occaſion. Their elevated rank approaching ſo near to their perſons, as to make them always the principal executors of their royal will.

I ſhould never have dared to relate to your majeſty, what antiquity teaches us, that *Birth* has given pre-eminence to this order. And that ſo great is the difference between this order and the reſt of the people, that it never could ſo much as think of ſuffering any kind of compariſon.

I could dwell on this ſubject, Sire, a conſiderable time, but ſo clear a truiſm does not ſtand in need of any greater proof than what is acknowledged by all the world.

Beſides I am ſpeaking before a King, whom we hope to find as jealous of maintaining to us all that we ſhare of his ſplendour, as we ſhould be to ſupplicate and entreat him. We are much concerned that ſo extraordinary a novelty ſhould open our lips to pour forth our complaints, ra-

ther than to offer up the moſt humble ſupplications for which we are aſſembled.

Sire, your Majeſty has been graciouſly pleaſed, to aſſemble the Eſtates General of the three orders of your kingdom, deſtined and ſeparated amongſt themſelves in functions and qualities. The church, devoted to the ſervice of God and the cure of ſouls, holds the firſt rank, we honour the prelates and miniſters as our fathers, and as the mediators of our reconciliation with God.

The nobility, Sire, holds the ſecond, it is the right arm of your juſtice, the ſupport of your crown, and the invincible power of the ſtate.

Under the happy auſpices and valourous conduct of kings, at the price of their blood, and by the employment of their victorious arms, public tranquillity has been eſtabliſhed; and by their pains and labours the

Tiers-Etat, the people, is about to enjoy the convenience and happineſs which reſult from that peace. This order, Sire, which holds the laſt place in this aſſembly, is an order compoſed of the people, both of the town and of the country the laſt are almoſt all the vaſſals of the two firſt orders, the citizens are made up of burgeſſes, ſhop-keepers, artizans, and a few officers, theſe are they who, forgetful of their duty, without the ſanction of their conſtituents, dare to compare themſelves with us.

I am aſhamed, Sire, to repeat the terms by which they have offended us; they compare your kingdom to a family compoſed of three brothers, they call the clergy they eldeſt, the nobility the ſecond, and themſelves the youngeſt.

Into what a miſerable ſituation are we now fallen! If this be true, how does it

come to paſs, that ſo many ſervices rendered to the country time immemorial, ſo many honours and dignities acquired by their labours and hereditarily tranſmited inſtead of elevating, ſhould be looked on as the means of ſinking them into the moſt intimate ſociety with the vulgar, or into the loweſt kind of ſociety amongſt men; and, not content with calling themſelves our brethren, they aſcribe to themſelves the reſtoration of the kingdom, to which, as all France can bear witneſs, they have not in the leaſt contributed. It muſt therefore be evident to all, that they cannot in any manner compare themſelves to us, an enterprize ſo ill founded cannot be endured.

Sire, give your judgment in this point, and by a declaration founded in juſtice, cauſe them to return to their duty, and to acknowledge what we are, and the difference betwixt us; and for this, we moſt

humbly intreat your Majesty, in the name of all the nobility of France, (whose deputies we are) to the end that, supported in their natural pre-eminence, they may devote, as they always have, their honour, and their life, to the service of your Majesty.

"Ecquid sentitis in quanto contemptu vivatis? Lucis vobis hujus partem, si liceat, adimant. Quod spiratis, quod vocem mittitis, quod formas hominum habetis indignantur."

LIV. lib. iv. c. 56.

THE END.